

**King County Agriculture Commission  
Minutes from January 11, 2007  
Issaquah Fish Hatchery  
Issaquah**

**Commissioners Present:** Nancy Hutto, Bob Tidball, Ben Kodama, Bob Vos, Larry Pickering, Roger Calhoon, Grant Davidson, Judy Taylor

**Commissioners Absent:** Julie Haakenson, Lu Eng, Robert Holland, Ewing Stringfellow, George Irwin

**Staff:** Steve Evans, Judy Herring, Claire Dyckman, Kathy Creahan, King County (KC) Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD) Agriculture Programs.

**Guest Agency Staff:** Josh Monahan, King Conservation District (KCD); Bee Cha, Todd Murray, Washington University Extension (Extension); Paul Reitenbach, Department of Development and Environmental Services; Marilyn Cope, King County Council; Mark Randle, U.S. Small Business Administration; David Spohr, King County Ombudsperson.

**Guests:** Fong Cha, Children's Garden and Ames Creek Farms

Nancy Hutto called the meeting to order.

**Decisions Made:**

**Motion:** Bob Vos moved and Larry Pickering seconded that the Commission write a letter to the County noting the economic losses from livestock in the floods; requesting an assessment of existing critter pads to determine which ones need to be raised; the allowance of new pads if necessary, and asking the County to work with us the County to look into alternative methods to address this situation. Request that this be done by summer of '07. Motion passed.

**Motion:** Michael Blakely moved that the Commission write the Executive, Council and Board of Health requesting that the county adjust our code to fit with that of the state regarding repairing or siting septic systems for existing houses in the flood plain, specifically doing away with the need to go to an appeals process. Motion passed.

**Motion:** Judy Taylor moved and Michael Blakely seconded that the Commission sign onto the latest plea to keep the baseline funding for the federal Farm Bill. Agriculture needs as much help as possible now as it has in the past.

**Recommendations:**

The County should use the 2008 Comp Plan update to look at the issue of limiting size or type of houses on farmlands with the purpose of keeping farm housing affordable into the future.

**Flood Relief Recommendations and Individual Suggestions:**

- There needs to be better flow of information among flood relief agencies.

- In order to help the Hmong farmers, contact the markets, the seed companies, Craig's list. Get word out at the Flower and Garden Show to bring tubers to the show.
- Establish/identify a small grants or loan program for flood victims.
- Put up a non-verbal warning system – such as a light in the valley – to put them on notice a flood is coming.
- There needs to be a better set up from the County both before and after floods.
- The existing critter pads need to be raised to provide adequate protection – high enough to project flood levels needed in the future.
- Determine the degree to which we can predict these floods. There is a delay in what is coming from the river compared to what is coming off the plateau.
- We have a lot more land development. Ask the county if the current stormwater regulations are adequate to cover the floods we will be receiving with climate change.

### **Discussion Points on Flood Prevention/Flood Relief**

*Michaele Blakely:* After development and rain events farmers are facing flood events far worse than they have faced before. With more development, tightlines going to the river, floods will only be more severe. This one killed animals, destroyed her house and her greenhouses. The critter pads were high enough to keep the chickens that roost out of water, but not the meat birds. USDA advisories mean that she can't sell her crops, even though there has been no testing to prove a problem. It took so long to get information on what to do – and there was no help appearing from anywhere. How long would it be before the valley was declared a disaster area? If it hadn't been for the help of friends, she wouldn't be here.

*Larry Pickering:* Larry saw livestock on critter pads standing in 2 ft. of water. If they had been sheep or goats, they would have been under. If there had been snow and this flood had been higher, the livestock would not have made it.

*Fong Cha:* Forty-four of sixty Hmong farmers have reported at least \$40,000 loss each, totaling well over \$700,000. Much of the loss is related to equipment which costs a lot to replace. Other loss is the bulbs. Some are thinking about abandoning farming because they invested over \$40,000 in bulbs a year ago - dahlia bulbs cost \$5 - \$12 a piece – and need several years of sales before they begin to return that investment.

The Hmong need help this next month if they are to be in the fields for the spring season. Fong knew the flood was coming, but not how high: he moved his equipment up higher, but not high enough. They badly need funding to fix equipment, and they need bulbs.

*Bee Cha:* Of the 78 farmers he has contacted, they have a total of \$1,078,000 in losses. The biggest problem is information flow among agencies and farmers. FEMA gave one week notice only. The language barrier and being misinformed added to why the Hmong were hit hard. There are no grants or funds to help. FSA will not cover any lost income from crops. The Hmong lack the skills to keep good records. They need better information that doesn't come too late.

The mechanic workshops provided by WSU were most valuable. More are needed. Bulbs are also needed. He is organizing donations of bulbs.

*Bob Tidball:* In the Green River Valley, the crops are covered every single year. Why are people picking on the Snoqualmie farmers that they can't sell their produce?

*Mark Randle:* The Small Business Administration is excluded from providing loans to farm crops, but can provide loans for buildings.

*David Spohr:* When Michael Blakely stated that USDA had barred her from selling any of her crops because her land was inundated by floodwaters. David Spohr, the County's Rural Ombudsman, said that as a trial attorney with the Justice Department, he used to defend the U.S. in "takings" suits. He was troubled by the idea that the USDA would just bar her from selling any crops without a more specific showing that her crops presented a threat. Steve Evans clarified that, no, USDA was not barring any sale, they were simply posting an advisory (which may remove the insurance protection they normally provide to farmers in case a consumer got sick. Mr. Spohr said that in that case, where USDA was simply choosing not to offer a benefit, instead of actually barring a sale or use, there was probably no "takings" claim.

See recommendations above that resulted from individual comments during discussion.

### **Brainstorm for 07 Priorities:**

The following items were suggested to be added to the priorities identified in '06:

- Farmland Preservation Program: resolve issues related to deeds and covenants.
- Affordability of Farmland, present and future: addressing the cost of the housing that is currently being permitted.
- Flooding, in all areas of the county: upland development; what the county does to control drainage; the need to enlarge critter pads and place new ones.
- Alluvial Fans
- Small handbook for new commissioners
- A fund to help farmers on the edge 0- potential services
- Succinct definition of where we see agriculture in the county in 10 – 20 years.
- Improve Farm Link: financing and loans for new farmers.
- Water Availability: ponds for summer, drain fields in winter.
- Diversify Hmong crops related to water.
- Examine Haakenson proposal related to agricultural preservation and funding.
- Marketing: especially more support for farm stands.

**Public Comment:** None.

### **Presentations**

**2008 Comprehensive Plan:** Paul Reitenbach described the Comp Plan update process for 08, asking us to use the comment form by February 2, and noting that Council will weigh in on the scope of issues to be addressed from March 1 to April 28.

### **Staff Report:**

Judy Herring reported that the Regulatory Committee Meeting was continuing its work on FPP Deeds and Covenants. Bob Tidball and Judy Taylor noted there may be issues of direction from the Commission or the County before they proceed much further. The Commission will be briefed on the status of the work at the next meeting.

Steve Evans reported that the Farmer Chef Connections meeting would be Monday February 5<sup>th</sup>; and that he attended a useful conference on water availability in Pt. Townsend.

The WLRD Ag program has hired Karen Kinney, a former Ag Commissioner.

**Agency Reports:**

**King Conservation District (KCD)** Josh Monaghan reviewed on the new Strategic Initiatives of the Conservation District: WSU programs such as Harvest Celebration, Small Farm Expo and the Sustainable Ag classes; Salmon Safe; Farm to School Connection; Pierce Co Greenhouse/food bank pilot; cost share for BMP's; support on immigrant farm liaison at WSU; and new technologies outreach.

The election for one position on the Board of Supervisors will be Feb. 13<sup>th</sup>, with 7 stations in the county.

The legislature is proposing a state level Office of Farmland Preservation.

Genetically modified Canola may pollute seed corps in the Skagit.

**WSU Coop Extension:** Todd Murray announced: over 400 people attended the Western Washington Horticulture Association conference; the Small Farm Expo will be March; WSU has begun a variety of classes including reducing costs by practical use of alternative energy systems, eating around the seasons, building cisterns.

Nancy Hutto adjourned the meeting.